

The Cup of Coffee Next to Me Makes Me Feel Idle

by Wenona Jonker

Those were the neglected days, neglected weeks, neglected summers, of hours that felt at once too quick and uncomfortably slow. I lived them with a cup of coffee on the table beside me and a pencil in my hand that would only occasionally spill onto the page. For every sentence there was a quick hour of busy stillness, too full of quick thoughts to overflow into anything meaningful. Intentions never actualized by inspiration—inspiration never bigger than the moment it took to take a sip of coffee and put a pencil to the page. I wish I could say that the stillness was full but I was too afraid to let it be full, or rather empty (stillness is usually fullest when it is (empty)). I was too afraid to attend the day. So I busied myself with other people's business.

The chair next to me has been occupied by three different cups of coffee: a white mocha, a cold brew, and a decaf latte. Why decaf? It isn't late—oh wait. It's been four hours. Quick hours that move too slowly for me to notice that they're moving at all.

I feel guilt about the idleness.
That's what it is—
not stillness.

Evenings at my parents' home could be still. They have all the potential to be still. The windows in my bedroom face east.

Theirs is not the dynamic light of the late evening west
Theirs is not the golden waves of high tide crashing through
the living room
Theirs is the tide rolling out,
a still pond, warm pink water
flowing through the trees between our house

and the next,
over windowsills,
over the sandy riverbed blanket on my bed,
turning to blue
Blue like the music from the record

playing in the living room,
crackling with dim stars...

This is where the moments are longest: when I can see the
old, yellow light reflected off the steeple of First Baptist
through the trees, like a mirror at the end of a hallway. When
the clouds float across the blue stillness, silent ships.

This is where the moments go too fast: when I try to use my
page to soak up the late evening sun.

I feel sorry for the late evening light. I think I exploit her in my
writing. She is the only place I feel still; she is where he
walked with me after all.

But "light like water" has been done before.

And my coffee is cold.